

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, November 15, 1876, with transcript

Letter from Miss Mabel G. Hubbard to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. Of Careon City, Nevada. Thursday, Nov. 15th. (1876?) My dear Alec:

Where do you suppose "your little girl," has been? Down fifteen or seventeen hundred feet into the earth!! We arrived here this morning at seven and changed cars at once for Virginia City. The road pursued a zigzag course through a wild mountain defile, going higher and ever higher till the pretty Carson River along whose tortuous bank we had at first journeyed, lay far below us, higher until we could peep over intervening mountains, and see the snow mountains beyond until we had left all vegetation except the hardy sage bush which covers the otherwise barren mountains all over the Rocky and Sierra Nevada ranges — far behind. We came at last to the height of 8000 feet, and entered one of the queerest little cities I ever saw in my life. It's houses mostly of the smallest size crowd closely together in narrow defiles or climb one above the other the steep mountain side. Nature has given but a scanty foothold for human habitations, and daring man has dug out broad streets along the mountains side, whole rows of them above each other, and there stately six story buildings have been reared. Generally however the houses even of the wealthiest are small, but some extremely pretty and each looking over the head of the one below it has a fine lookout over a tangled mass of high steep mountains with only narrow defiles between. The mountains grow ever higher as they are further away, until at last they end in snow capped heights. Between them dimly seen stretches the Red desert. Gazing around on the hillsides ever and anon are seen little holes or openings, they lead to the famed silver mines of Nevada, and it is into one of them that, our dresses 2 changed for workmen's pants, coat and hat we presently descend. Five of us that is for Mr. McKay cannot take more. We are placed in a elevator with two stands. Mr. Palmer and Mr. Kraft in the lower one, Sister, Miss Jenks and I on the middle, the upper one while Mr. McKay and

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another man stand around us. And then down we go the air grows close and damp, water pours down upon us and we grow hotter and hotter, and are glad when we stop and take off our coats, and then lantern in hand follow our guard through passage after passage, gazing half frightened at groups of stalwart half nude miners taking their noon rest. We are shown the dark and light grey quartz that form the walls and specimens are given us, we are shown the end of one side of the shaft, and taught to distinguish the good from the poor one, and then are escorted up to the daylight once more. I never appreciated your fresh air more. Poor Sister I had no idea she was as utterly exhausted as she was, we were quite frightened, but she has had quite a good dinner, and I think feels much better. Pretty soon after we had redressed Mrs. and Mr. Palmer and Rob and I drove through the defiles and back again stopping to see the process of crushing and smelting the ore. One powerful but not so very large piece of machinery does the whole work of crushing, there are two rows of basins one higher than another into which the ore is put and washed and the good part separated. We put our hands into a little pot where quicksilver was pouring, the fluid was so elastic just like a thin India-rubber ball, and the pretty silver stuck to our hands. Afterwards they let us handle a piece of the separated solid silver. It was still soft and so pretty I wanted to buy it, but they refused to sell it. In another building were arranged stores for smelting the ore, at one end the silver fluid was pouring slowly our drop by drop into a clay pail. Mr. McKay is said to be the richest man in the world being worth between 50 and 60 millions, he came here a poor miner and still looks and dresses like a common superintendent, he was quite pleasant and unassuming. The road from Carson to Virginia City is owned by four gentlemen, and cost six million and though it only takes two hours they charge five dollars for one ride. Papa says, because they can get it. Fortunately we did not have to pay. But we must get rich and make a long summer visit here sometime it is one of the most beautiful places I ever saw. What I have seen in Europe cannot compare with this American scenery. We reach Sacramento tomorrow early, and San Francisco at six. I will write as soon as I can again. Do you know I shall be quite glad when I am on our homeward way. I want to see you again as much as ever I can. We shall have a whole beautiful budget of letters from you in S.F. shall we not. It is

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nearly nine P.M. here and twelve o'clock with you, so you and I go to bed at the same time now.

With much love, Your, Mabel.